

Funding the Future

Article URL

<https://www.taxresearch.org.uk/Blog/2023/08/26/overcoming-fear/>

Published: January 12, 2026, 5:28 pm

I read two articles yesterday that had a particular impact on me.

One [was in the FT](#), and referred to Jay Powell's speech at Jackson Hole. Powell is, of course, chair of the US Federal Reserve. The Jackson Hole meeting is the annual meeting of the world's central bankers, who are the people who think they really rule the world.

Powell gave a hawkish speech. Although US core inflation is now down to only a little above 4%, he said that the task of beating inflation was not yet done, and in the process clearly implied that more interest rate rises are to come in the USA. No doubt other, equally stupid, governors of central banks will follow his example, including in the UK.

I use the word stupid advisedly. No one knows why we have a 2% inflation target. It was, once upon a time, chosen by the central bank of New Zealand, and then it was adopted by the world. There is, however, no theoretical justification for it. There is no evidence that it is any better than the other target. There is no evidence either that achieving it increases the well-being of anyone. The target could have easily been 3%, or even 4%. It is entirely possible that the world would have been just as well off as a result. Indeed, and as I reflected as I read the article, that will almost certainly soon prove to be the case now.

Powell's determination to achieve a goal that he cannot, and will never be able to, justify is an example of the supreme arrogance of some in society who have been given power over others, and believe that they are right as a consequence. There was no hint within his speech of doubt and no real apology for the pain that he will impose.

That pain will be real. It will be counted in lost jobs, failed businesses, homes lost to foreclosure, personal debt crises, couples torn apart, families separated, children denied the stability that they deserve, and blighted futures. All of those will be Powell's responsibility one day, when he will owe the most enormous apology for the folly of his actions. The same should be said of the Governor of the Bank of England, Andrew Bailey. I hope that one day he too will be held to account for the misery that he will have wholly unnecessarily imposed upon society as a consequence of his similarly

arrogant pursuit of a policy that he knows is without justification.

The [other article that I read was in the Guardian](#) and referred to comments by Michael Parkinson's son, also called Michael. He noted that his father had suffered from impostor syndrome throughout his life.

Michael Parkinson was the son of a miner. He was brought up with all the hardship that resulted from that, including seeing his father suffer the physical consequence of that extraordinarily demanding job.

Michael Parkinson's parents did not want him to have to go down a mine. They were determined that their children should not suffer that fate, and Michael Parkinson did not do so. He became a journalist, and then the TV interview and personality who commanded massive audiences. He was, by any standard, extremely successful. But, as his son noted, he never overcame the doubt. That was with him until his dying day, and I am not surprised.

I am not saying that my own situation is the same as Michael Parkinson's. My parents both had professional qualifications, but they were the first in their families to have them, and I can still recall witnessing the poverty from which they, and most especially my mother, came in my childhood.

I saw the tin bath hanging behind my granny's back door, which was the only one that she and my handicapped aunt shared in my childhood, until my parents were able to help them get a house with a bath.

I remember, too, the fear that they both had of money, or rather its absence. This was particularly acute in the case of my mother. I especially recall the story that she told so graphically of the pain she felt when as a child she had to tell her mother that she had dropped and lost a half crown coin (12.5p) when her father earned no more than £1.50 a week (30 shillings). Her own mother's anguish at this loss was obviously still deeply ingrained in her when she related this story to me as a child. I knew as a result what it meant to live in a household where such a loss meant the difference between having something that week, and not having it, because there were no savings to make good the deficit. My own parents were I think, intensely cautious with money as a consequence. That has rubbed off on me. I don't regret it. It is why I feel what Powell, Bailey and others are doing so intensely, and I will not apologise for that.

I strongly suspect that Michael Parkinson knew that same feeling. I also suspect he never forgot it. So of course he suffered from imposter syndrome. He came from a background of insecurity and understood what it meant in a way that those who come from privilege never can and never will.

Parkinson moved in a world of privilege, but I am not surprised that he never truly felt a part of it.

Nor am I surprised that his son says that to his end he was deeply committed to social justice but that he never have much time for politicians, and most especially those who sought power for its own sake. Quite rightly, he was bemused by then. After all, what is the point of power unless you are going to use it to change the world for the better, which can only be done if you relieve the pain of those who suffer?

That takes me back to Jay Powell and to all those who think they have the right to impose misery on this world, including our current government and, most especially, the Labour Party, which has committed itself to central bank independence and the consequent rule of privilege whilst also endorsing the whole idea that lives must be sacrificed to economic theory for which no justification is known.

I will never understand those central bankers who think they have the right to impose the pain that their policies will create.

Likewise, I will never understand politicians who will give such people power when they know the human cost of doing so.

Both these things are beyond my comprehension, as is the possibility that someone who claims to be concerned for human well-being might seek power without ever seeking to use it to relieve human suffering, which is what it seems to me the Labour Party is now doing.

I do not know why I got the opportunity to say such things. I remain continually surprised that people take note of them. I will never, however, doubt that it is my purpose to do so even though I was born to parents who told me that my security depended upon my keeping my head down and never discussing either politics or religion because that was the only way in which I might just make it through life without too much difficulty given the background that I had.

I chose not to believe them. My experiences of inequality too early in life, starting from the moment when I was offered a place at a grammar school and my twin brother was not, made it clear to me that being silent was never, eventually, going to be an option for me.

But do I suffer from impostor syndrome despite that? Of course I do. Who would not when seeking to speak truth to power when your whole upbringing was amongst people who never thought they had any or the right to it?

That role and that syndrome can create a lonely place. I am sure Michael Parkinson knew that.

I am, however, very glad that Michael Parkinson overcame his fear and succeeded. I am equally pleased that his son has spoken as he has. He was right to do so.

Meanwhile, my disquiet at the behaviour of central bankers will continue until such time

as they change, economic theory changes, inflation targets change, or they are removed from their positions of privilege. Those things are what social justice requires, and it is our job to demand social justice in any way we can because unless we do, those with power will continue to treat us with disdain, and that is totally unacceptable.

In summary, we have to overcome our fear. It's the only way to create change. But that does not mean it's easy.